

Michael Cowen:

This is Michael Cowen and welcome to Trial Lawyer Nation.

Voiceover:

You are the leader in the courtroom and you want the jury to be looking to you for the answers.

Voiceover:

When you figure out your theory, never deviate.

Voiceover:

You want the facts to be consistent, complete, incredible.

Voiceover:

The defense has no problem running out the clock. Delay is the friend of the defense.

Voiceover:

It's tough to grow a firm by trying to hold on and micromanage.

Voiceover:

You've got to front load a simple structure for jurors to be able to hold onto.

Voiceover:

What types of creative things can we do as lawyers, even though we don't have a trial setting?

Voiceover:

Whatever you got to do to make it real, you've got to do to make it real, but the person who needs convincing is you.

Voiceover:

Welcome to the award-winning podcast, Trial Lawyer Nation, your source to win bigger verdicts, get more cases, and manage your law firm. Now here's your host, noteworthy author, sought after speaker, and renowned trial lawyer, Michael Cowen.

Michael Cowen:

Today on Trial Lawyer Nation we have my partner, Malorie Peacock. How you doing Mallory?

Malorie Peacock:

I'm doing good. I'm happy that you're back from vacation.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. That's actually what we're going to talk about is, I just took a two week out-of-the-country vacation. I did not take my work cell phone with me. I spent a total of 10 minutes over two calls because

one got a little long, there was a two minute and eight minute call while during those two weeks, calling the office and I checked my email three times during those two weeks.

Malorie Peacock:

I didn't even know that you checked it at all.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Well, I'm working on it. Next year, maybe I won't check it at all. This year, I checked it three times. I think that's something that would be an interesting thing to talk about both how I was able to do that and why, and then what it was like for you being in charge of the law firm while I was gone.

Malorie Peacock:

I think it's a really interesting topic because I've heard you tell people before, "I go on vacation for two weeks and I leave my cell phone at home in another country," People go, "No, you didn't." Or, "What?" How you did it, I think, it could be really interesting to the audience.

Michael Cowen:

Well then, I'll let you take the lead.

Malorie Peacock:

Okay. Well, a few years ago, I want to say it was three or four years ago was the first time that you did it. That time, I think you went for... Was it four weeks without a phone? Or maybe you went two weeks and then came back, but were still on vacation or something like that.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I took four straight weeks off, no phone for two of them, the first time.

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah. When you first told me you were going to do this a few years ago, I thought, "Okay." Felt confident that everything would be fine, but I didn't think that you'd be able to do it when you first told me about it. So, the first time it happened and you went and you didn't call in, you maybe sent me a text, maybe two or three times. "Hey, checking in." Every time I said, "Everything's fine, don't worry about it." I was surprised about your self control and your ability to enjoy your vacation, not check in, and just trust that nothing was burning down. Every year since then, you've been trying to at least go two weeks, like you said, if not four, and I think it's been successful. We've been able to manage, we've kept cases coming in. We've kept settling cases. Litigation continues, and the offices continues to be managed, but it's a team that you've put in place to be able to do that.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I will say, the four weeks actually caused some stress on the firm. When I got back, there were some fires that needed to be put out and frankly, caused some stress in my family to have me home for four weeks and not leave them. That's why I decided four weeks was too much. I'm hoping that sometime the next 10 years, we get to the point where I can spend more and more time of taking these little breaks as I get older and maybe want to start transitioning where I'm not running the firm anymore in 10 years or 15 years. I think it's a kind of good practice way to do it.

Michael Cowen:

But for my own mental health, for my own ability to bond with my family, I found that not having my cell phone with me, which takes away my ability to check email while I'm sitting out. It means that when other people text me, I don't get those texts. When other people call me, I don't get those calls, because it's so hard not to take them when they're happening. Also if I have my phone, there's no one else to answer it or to respond to those texts. I haven't yet to find a technology that makes the texts or phone calls go somewhere else from my cell phone. So to me, it's the only way that I can really be present for my family. Then with the time zone difference too, I would've been getting texts and phone calls while we're all asleep. I might can just silence the phone, but it just, it's better to have it here and have someone man... Actually, woman it, I guess. It was Reagan my assistant that was handling my phone.

Malorie Peacock:

So a few years ago, when you first did this, what made you decide that the firm was ready for you to do this? That you had the people in place where you felt like, okay, I can definitely do this and the firm won't burn down while I'm gone.

Michael Cowen:

Well, I didn't know for sure the firm was ready until I did it. Now one thing is, even though I don't take my work phone with me, I do have a second phone and very, very, very few people have that phone number. It's just my parents, my wife, you, Sonya, my assistant Reagan, and Teresa, our operations manager. So, those seven people are the only people in the whole world that have that number. I only use it when I go on vacation. Other than that, I let my son play video games on it and stuff, I don't use it for text or calls because it's strictly my vacation phone or I need some time off. So, that gives me some comfort that I know that if there is a true emergency, y'all could get ahold of me.

Michael Cowen:

There was one time when I was on vacation, there was a true emergency and somebody was forging our checks from our trust account and trying to pass them. I was sitting on a balcony in Hawaii with the bank having to shut down and freeze our account, but make sure the outstanding checks didn't get frozen. You know that, because I was the signatory, I'm the only one that could do that. So, knowing that if there was a true emergency that y'all could get ahold of me, and then knowing that having enough trust in you that we've built up over the years to know that you'd know the difference between a real emergency and a non-emergency was a lot. But people listen to the podcast know that we've been working for years and putting together policies and procedures and knowing how things run, and then not a whole lot happens in litigation with less than a two week run up.

Michael Cowen:

Every now and then, you'll get a hearing set, but typically depositions, definitely trials, hearings usually have more than two weeks notice. So, we can plan for those things and make sure that nothing happens during those two weeks where I'm needed. Some courts, people follow these vacation notices, but we have enough other competent lawyers that there really wasn't anything that could happen that I didn't think that one of the other nine of you at the firm couldn't handle, because you're smart, competent people and you can do that. But, a lot of that was that the firm was prepared for it.

Michael Cowen:

The other thing that had to be prepared for is people we do business with. I was always scared that, well, the referring lawyers that we work with would get upset that I wasn't available 24/7, but they all seem really happy for me that I get to do it. We do care about each other and they know that if I keep myself healthy, I can do a better job on the cases I do for them. But, I let them know. I don't just surprise them where they call and I just don't answer. I got a list of all the people that we're doing business with currently, that we currently have cases with, and I let them all know, "Hey, I want to be out of town from this date to this date. I'm not going to have my cell phone, so if you send me a text my assistant Reagan's going to do it. So just keep in mind, I might think something's funny, but she might not. So, watch what you send."

Michael Cowen:

Although, we're all in our fifties, we're pretty tame in what we sent each other, but there was one friend on one chat group that was a little horrified when I told him someone else was going to be monitoring my phone. But I said, "Well, then don't send anything you wouldn't want her to read." But I just said, "Look, on the cases we're working together, Mallory's handling these cases and this is her email address, and Sonya is handling these cases and Laura's handling these cases." We just listed them out. "If you have a new case, this is who you need to talk to. If there's an emergency, call Mallory. She can handle it." We just let them all know so that people were prepared for it. Then, worked really hard with Reagan, my assistant, on this is what to do. If people call for this, route them here. If people call for that, route them here. This is how you answer them. Just working with her so we had a plan, and she was able to handle those things.

Malorie Peacock:

How specific was your plan for your assistant? I think people are wondering, did she just make it up when people called or did you actually write out some sample scripts? How specific did you get with her?

Michael Cowen:

Yeah, the first time I did. I wrote out a lot of sample scripts. Reagan has a really good head on our shoulders, and so I don't need to be as micromanaging with her. But, we did have some sample... Like, "If someone asks about a case, say Michael's going to be out of town from this time to this time. But so-and-so is handling the case in his absence, is it okay that I'm going to pass the message along to them?" If someone called about a new case, "Michael's out of town, but we're ready to jump in. Can you talk to Yolanda or Mallory, if it was a bigger case, so that we can get more information and make the decision?"

Michael Cowen:

Again, letting people know that on 95% of cases, y'all can make a decision without my input because again, you're smart. You've been doing this for a long time. You're in the meetings when we're discussing what our case selection criteria are. As I told you and told everyone else at the firm, I empowered you to make decisions while I'm gone. Even if you made a different decision than the decision I would make, the small risk of that happening is more than worth it for my ability to go on vacation for two weeks without my phone.

Malorie Peacock:

Whenever you're gone, I always try to think, what would Michael Cowen do? There were a few decisions that I was able to just push off until you came back. We know when you're coming back, right? So I think when you came back, you had a list from your assistant of all the things that I was able to at least push off, but there were only a couple of things I had to make a decision about right then to get the ball rolling on something. If I didn't make the right decision, I would know that you would tell me later privately and say, "Hey, that wouldn't be what I would've done." But, I did try to do my best to think, what would Michael want to do, and do that.

Michael Cowen:

Well, thank you, and it worked. But, we've also worked together for 12 years. For other people thinking of doing this, I would make sure that you have systems in place, that you have people you trust in place before you do it. I definitely, if I had tried this, let's say in 2001 or 2005, it would've been a disaster. We weren't ready yet. Back then, I had my cell phone with me and I did return call, check my email every night from Europe when I went on a European vacation in 2004. I did have to call into the office every day when I was out, "Hey, is everything okay?"

Michael Cowen:

Then part of it, there was a little part of me that liked being that important, where I had to call in every day and that things couldn't go without me, and I had to learn to let that go and just maybe learn a little humility I'm not somewhat smarter than everyone else, that other people can't make decisions. There's a great freedom to that, because we have to unplug to be able to get back in... We have a really busy August coming up, and if I went burned out when I am set for trial with somebody at the firm for five different trials in four weeks. Four weeks in a row, one to two trials every week are set. Again, the only way I can do that is that we have really good, smart people that can do 99% of the work getting those cases ready, and then I come in and help where I add the most value for the trials. Because I could not get ready for that many trials myself, if I was in charge of getting those cases ready.

Michael Cowen:

But, yeah. Because we have systems in place, because we have good people, and also, you had other people to lean on while you were gone. We have a management team and y'all still met every Friday without me, and so if it was a decision you weren't ready to make on your own, you could talk to Teresa. When Sonya got back from her vacation, because she was out one week, too, to Sonya and then come up with that.

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah. I did decide next year that you and Sonya can't take a vacation at the same time. There needs to not just be me, maybe have her here too because we're litigating cases, so I'm not always immediately available when something happens. But if there's two of us or three of us here, then maybe someone is available if something is happening and there's something more urgent. But, there was more management in the week that you and Sonya were both gone, partly more management than litigation work that I was doing, which was part of it. It's fine, but I think next year I'm going to insist you do your vacation separately.

Michael Cowen:

I originally had planned on taking my vacation much earlier. I was going to go at the end of May and early June, but then my son was going to be senior in high school. When we talked to his college counselor,

he's like, "Well, the SAT's June 4th or August 27th." I wanted him to have a second chance in case he didn't do well, and so we moved my vacation because of, I wanted him to be able to take his SAT and do his SAT prep. He did all right on the SAT, so it worked out. But, yeah. Next year, don't let me do that.

Malorie Peacock:

So in the week before you were going to go on vacation, was there anything that you did that people would want to know? Because you're saying we have systems in place, but these are systems we've had in place for a long time. But, there was some stuff that you did to prepare right before you went out.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Well, one was letting everyone know. Two was really going over the calendar, going over the deadlines, what was coming up so that people wouldn't need to reach out or wait or panic, that we would have that planned out. The third thing, and this is something I want to try to keep doing, is I told all the lawyers that Reagan, my assistant was going to monitor my email. If it was any email about a case, if that other lawyer was copied on it, the lawyer that's like the primary handling lawyer at the firm, that she was just going to delete it and they're going to be in charge of it. If that lawyer wasn't copied on it, she was going to forward it to them and then delete it, and so that they had to assume that I am not going to read any case related emails.

Michael Cowen:

If it's something where they need to talk to me about it, well, if it's a true emergency, which didn't happen, then they need to talk to you or Reagan, and then let them judge whether it's worthy of actually calling me or not. If it's not true emergency, then they need to let me know that they need to make an appointment to talk to me about it when they get back. Because, me trying to monitor emails on so many different people's cases is too much.

Michael Cowen:

So, I think I'm going to try to stick with that now so I can focus even more on just the big stuff. I just get distracted by all these other emails and it's hard for me not to read my emails as they come in, but if I could just only check my emails so many times a day and let Reagan forward and delete so I never even see them, then I could say more focused.

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah. I think it's a good idea, especially because you're copied on a lot of emails that you don't need to look at. Just because you're listed counsel on a case with us, you don't need to look at the day-to-day things. It is distracting to look at things that you never needed to look at, but to decide that you've already spent a few minutes looking at it. It does waste a lot of time, and when you have another lawyer that can just tell you about it, or if you need to see it, send you a message about it or something like that, then you know, "Okay, this is something that needs my attention," without having to weed through all of the other stuff.

Michael Cowen:

I will tell you, if I didn't have the ability to check my email... I did check it three times because, well, a couple was because I was bored because my family was taking forever to get ready and I just needed something to do to occupy my mind.

Malorie Peacock:

You could play Candy Crush or check your emails. Those are the choices.

Michael Cowen:

I had two games on my phone and I was bored with both of them, and so then I went to my email. I logged in to file mine a couple times just to look at my tasks, or I knew there was a mediation and I wondered what happened to the mediation. But having the ability to do that takes the stress away because I know that if something did come up, I can look it up.

Malorie Peacock:

Right, right. How many times did we call you during the two weeks?

Michael Cowen:

Zero.

Malorie Peacock:

So it worked, right? I don't know. Maybe when you got back, you were like, "Oh, maybe they should have called me." I don't know.

Michael Cowen:

No, absolutely not. I thought I was going to have a much longer to-do list and I didn't. Things happened while I was gone. Our bookkeeper gave her two week notice. That's a huge thing, but what could I have done about that? Teresa went and talked to her, she couldn't talk her out of it. So she, as far as I know, drafted an ad and put that in and it's going to start recruiting another one. What would me being here have changed any of that? Cases settled, they came in, the world kept turning.

Malorie Peacock:

Yep. I think hearing the success story about it is helpful to people, because I think they hear that you left your phone, but I bet in the back of their mind they're thinking, "Yeah, but he probably ended up taking calls. He had some phone number. They called his wife or he went to an internet cafe and checked his email every day." But the reality is, you didn't.

Michael Cowen:

I didn't.

Malorie Peacock:

I did text you about one work related thing. You were out. Something short, and you were able to respond to me right away.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. But, it was just one thing.

Malorie Peacock:

Right.

Michael Cowen:

I had given instructions to accounting to write a giant check for something and before you signed a six figure check, you wanted to make sure it was really me.

Malorie Peacock:

Right. It wasn't fraud or something.

Michael Cowen:

Right. That was appropriate and it took 15, 20 seconds of my time. That's one of the things, I know and respect you enough where I trust your judgment on those things.

Malorie Peacock:

The other thing that has to be possible with your firm, of course, to do this is that you have someone else that's here that can authorize payment or write checks, or that you've planned enough ahead so that you don't have to write any checks for the time that you're gone. Firm does checks once a week, but every once in a while there's an emergency or "emergency." People say things are emergencies that never really end up being emergencies, but it is what it is. So, that would be one thing that you would have to plan for. You'd have to either authorize someone to pay on your account or just make sure you plan in advance so you don't need to be issuing any checks during the time you're gone.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I think sometime in the next year, I want to find a way to get myself out of being the main person that signs checks, too. But, I haven't figured that out yet because again, it's not a high value. It's only done out of fear that if I'm not the one signing checks that things will slip through. I haven't caught any fraud, but I've caught like, "Hey, we already paid that." Or, "Hey, we didn't agree to pay that." That kind of thing.

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah. I catch those every time I sign checks. It's part of doing business, that that happens. Someone has to be keeping an eye on it and you don't just automatically send out checks just because someone sent you an invoice. But, part of it is just instinct. You have to know enough of your cases to think, "Hmm, this is a weird thing that someone has requested us to pay." Or enough about the case to say, "There's no way that we would owe this expert. This must be a duplicate invoice," or something like that. Who at the firm knows that much information besides you? But, could someone else? Yes. They could learn.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah, absolutely. No. I think this is a real lesson and it's Bill Biggs who, the last podcast we did, told me to read a book. Actually told me during the podcast, called Multipliers and I was listening to it during my trip. I haven't quite finished it yet because I only listen to it when I was flying and stuff. I'm not going to be spend time in Paris and Barcelona listening to a business book. But, it really is on how great leaders get more out of people because they develop them and empower them and get them to reach their potential. Part of that is you have to let people do things and not do everything for them, and you have to get out of the way sometimes. I think this is kind of teaching me that I could probably be doing even more of that, which would free me up to really...

Michael Cowen:

One of my frustrations in the business is I still spend a lot more of my time than I want to on smaller things. Little details in smaller cases take away my time to spend as much time as I'd like on our five biggest cases, spend as much time as I'd like on developing our lawyers to become better lawyers. So, seeing that we survived two weeks without me here at all and not really even looking much to the firm at all, I'm thinking more and more like, how can I train and empower people to do more and more of the small and medium stuff so that I can really be present for the big stuff?

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah. I mean one of the things from my perspective that is always eye-opening to me whenever you go on vacation, you've done it for a few years now, is how much management you do for the firm. I know you do a lot of management, but when I have to do some of it feels like, "Wow, Michael is fielding a lot of questions all day long." So, getting yourself out of that a little more, I think you'd be happier because I know when I was doing it, I kept feeling like, "Oh, I just want to do my cases. Can someone else figure this out?"

Michael Cowen:

Yep.

Malorie Peacock:

But, that's the way that we have it set up and at some point, you're the owner of the firm, you have to figure some of it out. But, I do realize how much of the management you do do.

Michael Cowen:

At some point, that's probably going to be you doing more and more of it till you're the owner of the firm, so we need to figure these things out for the future and that's not tomorrow. I'm not old, I'm only 52, but I don't plan on doing this at 80. You've got a lot more years left in you than I have in me, so we are going to have to... I think this is good stuff. It's good little practices to start getting you used to that and maybe thinking of ways like, "Man, that was a real pain in the butt. How could we do this better where it's not constantly interrupting me?"

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah. Yeah. Yep.

Michael Cowen:

So, what is experience like of having to deal with that management and dealing with, you have the responsibility now of making decisions? Because, I've been told I don't want to make them.

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah. Some decisions come easy to me because I've seen you make the decisions in the past, so it feels like I know what the what the right answer is. I know what you would do. Then, some of them were a little harder. For example, the bookkeeper quit and we had to come up with an ad because me and Teresa, our office manager, had talked about it and I said, "Well, we need to post something today because she only gave us two weeks. We need to move the ball now, start recruiting so that we're not

too long without a bookkeeper." Part of it was, well, what do we want in a bookkeeper? We haven't hired one in a really long time because she had been with the firm for a while.

Malorie Peacock:

I had to sit down and think about it and think about, do we want to train someone from scratch? Do we want someone with some experience? How much do we want to pay? What is the range? All of these kind of things that go into putting an ad in for a position that we haven't really put an ad out for a really long time. It was stressful because I kept feeling like, is this the right move? But, the stakes were low because you were going to be back. We probably wouldn't hire anybody before you got back. So if you thought, "Oh, my God. Y'all are insane. You're giving away the farm for a bookkeeper," or something like that, you could correct the mistake before we did it. Right? But still, it felt a lot of stress about it because I felt like, I hope these are the decisions that Michael would make because it's not a decision I'd seen you make before.

Malorie Peacock:

But when it comes to the case stuff, that stuff is easier for me to make decisions on because I feel like I have the background and the knowledge for it. So I can just say, "Okay, yes, do this." A lawyer came to me and was like, "Is this a good settlement on a case?" I looked it up, learned about the case and said yes to one, no to another. Hold out for more money. Those, I feel good about. It's the more the management stuff that I feel still a little, am I doing the right thing here?

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. You to know a little secret?

Malorie Peacock:

Yes.

Michael Cowen:

I still feel like that. Am I doing the right thing here? That never goes away, Malorie. I hate to break it to you. It gets a little easier. I just came back. I got back Saturday night about midnight. I got home and I got up early the next morning to fly to Seattle for the AHA convention. One of the things I like is meeting some of the younger lawyers and trying to put them in touch with the right people that want to get involved. So, I was talking to a couple of the younger lawyers like, "Well, I don't know how you ever get to know enough about this stuff, I feel like."

Michael Cowen:

I know one, I'm not going to say her name because I don't want to embarrass her, but she was actually speaking at the convention and she's like, "I've been practicing this over and over again. Everyone else knows so much more than I do," and all this stuff. I'm like, "I want to give you a little secret. They don't. You'll do just fine. There's people speaking on things that they haven't even done before, they just got someone else's PowerPoint. So, stop being so hard on yourself."

Michael Cowen:

Everyone's got a little bit of this imposter syndrome, but we never have all the answers. It's always, we're just doing our best when it comes to management stuff, especially. Now the law stuff, you never have all

the answers, but we get pretty good at that. But how to hire a new bookkeeper when that's something we hopefully only do every 5 to 15 years, we're not ever going to have a lot of practice in that. The one thing I do know is that if any of us were going to give away the farm and overpay, it would not be you or Teresa. It would be me.

Malorie Peacock:

I did tell everybody before, or when you left the first attorney meeting we had, I said, "If you're asking me for money for a case, you just remember that I'm not Michael Cowen. I'll probably say no."

Michael Cowen:

Yeah.

Malorie Peacock:

Because I am a little more conservative when it comes to that than you are.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Probably the right result is probably somewhere in the middle. But I get irrationally exuberant and overspend my cases and other people underspend, so maybe we all get together, we'll get end up right where we need to be.

Malorie Peacock:

It all evens out. 99% of the time you're right, we should have spent the money on it. I usually hold out a little too long and then I think, "Oh, my gosh. Okay, we need to spend the money now." It's urgent because I think, "Oh, I should have just done this when I thought about it originally, instead of trying to wait and it all evens out.

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Michael Cowen:

Let's think of how we could make this better next year. The biggest things I did is we had good policies and procedures in place. I let other people know that we did business and I was going to be out, and this is who you need to talk to and how to get ahold of them, and had it in writing so they would all have that. There were no surprises. Gave very clear instructions to you, to Teresa, and especially to Reagan, the person that was handling my email and phone and text, about this is how you respond in these... I thought of the most common situations would come up, this is how to respond. Then, you've suggested in the future that Sonya and I not vacation at the same time.

Malorie Peacock:

Yeah.

Michael Cowen:

But, anything else that you think we should change for the future to make it better? If other people should think of it, they're going to do this.

Malorie Peacock:

One of the things that's important at our firm, and if people have listened to our podcast, they've heard me and you talk about this before, is our meeting structure. We have more meetings than I think people would think that you'd need, but they're all short meetings. But, keeping in contact with each other really helps cut down on the amount of confusion. I think when you first left, I thought, I don't want to take control of any of Michael's meetings because he does a weekly meeting with intake, a weekly meeting with management. There's a couple of different meetings that Michael does without me and Sonya. I did feel behind on stuff because I wasn't participating in those meetings, and I honestly think if I had had those meetings with the people that Michael supervises more directly, then there would've been some time saved with back and forth confusion on my part where I'm trying to get caught up on what's going on and I would've known the more day-to-day so I could have more easily made a quicker decision instead of a bunch of back and forth.

Malorie Peacock:

I think next year I might actually probably do your meetings so that I'm more abreast of what's going on and I can catch things as they're happening instead of hearing about them and thinking, "Oh, my gosh. Wait. We need to go back two days and not have done that." But, I should do that next year.

Michael Cowen:

I think you should, I think, not just for your benefit, but for the benefit of the people I manage. The intake people need to know what to focus on today. The marketing people, my assistant need to know what their focus needs to be. They need to have a way to get immediate feedback. I think that there needs to be some kind of... A lot of times we're having those meetings while you're having meetings with your team, so there'd have to be some minor adjustments.

Malorie Peacock:

Right, right. Yeah.

Michael Cowen:

That's probably a good thing.

Malorie Peacock:

For the audience, the reason that we had decided not to is because I was still obviously managing my team while this is happening. I still have an active litigation docket and that's all still happening, and Michael's meetings would take place at the same time as mine so we thought, "No. Let's not move everything around. I'll just do the meetings without me." But, I think I need to be a little more involved next year or someone else.

Michael Cowen:

Or someone else.

Malorie Peacock:

Right.

Michael Cowen:

Someone needs to be in charge of those.

Malorie Peacock:

Whoever's going to be the one that's in charge of doing it. But, I think immediate feedback for people is important. That's why we went to this meeting structure is because people needed more immediate feedback than lawyers would give if they're in depositions or hearings and all that all day. I think I would change that. Then, I would probably make sure that our bookkeeper doesn't quit.

Michael Cowen:

If you could tell me how to do that.

Malorie Peacock:

But, so everything else... Legally, we have the most amazing office manager who has been working with Michael for a long time, too. So, she is a nice crutch to lean on for things that I wasn't super familiar with, she was, so we were a good team, I think, in that regard. That we were able to lean on each other, which was nice. So making sure she's available, but she was this time. So, that made it easier.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Well, I will say that this is my first day back in the office because of the AHA conference, and then we did our firm Employee Appreciation Event that we do once a year yesterday. It was actually 16 or 18 days I was out from the Friday that I left. I guess the one thing I would mention that I would do different, I just remember that is I left my phone here and then I had another phone I was trying to set up. These were more like personal apps, but I have two factor authentication set for a lot of things. Also some websites that I wanted to go log into while I was in Europe, I had two effector authentication. So without my phone, I couldn't log in or I couldn't install certain things on my other phone. So, I would've set all that up better before I left.

Michael Cowen:

The other problem I had, I was traveling in Europe and so I had a fraud alert on the credit card, and then the fraud department wanted to do two factor authentication. I'm like, "Well, I don't have my phone," and it made them real suspicious. Finally, after about 15 minutes talk, gave them enough of my information where they believed it was me. But, it was interesting.

Malorie Peacock:

I feel like every time you go out of the country, you have one of those fraud alerts. I don't know what's up with your credit. I never have that issue. I don't really notice.

Michael Cowen:

Oh, yeah. No.

Malorie Peacock:

So separate note, you knew it was going to happen. You even told me. You're like, "Every time. I know it's going to happen and I just have to be ready for it."

Michael Cowen:

Yeah, and it did. It totally did. The funny one, I know the MasterCard, it's going to happen no matter what. Every time I use it outside the United States, I get one. Then my American Express, I bought a watch, I bought purses for my wife, no problems. While I was on the plane, I tried to buy an Audible credit to download a book to listen to. I've had to talk to them multiple times now, I'm getting fraud alerts from American Express for trying to buy a \$19 Audible credit. I don't want to admit how much I spent on purses, but I spent a lot more than \$19 at Chanel and Hermès.

Malorie Peacock:

How funny is that? How weird.

Michael Cowen:

Maybe they're used to me doing one and not the other, I don't know.

Malorie Peacock:

Now that you have your list of things that you had to do when you come back, does it feel overwhelming? Do you feel like, "These are some of the things that I wished that maybe Malorie and Teresa just handled instead of keeping on my list?"

Michael Cowen:

No, I have a fairly short... It's no longer than my to-do list usually is just from my own procrastination and taking on more than I should take on personally. But, I think it just is a real reminder to me that I really need to not take on more than I can do in a nine or ten hour day, and maybe even an eight hour day, one day. Really focus my time on the things where I add the most value to the firm, to our clients, to our referral partners, and realize that I have a lot of really smart, hardworking people here that if I let them do it, are really capable of doing things. Some of them, other than you, may have to struggle some because they'll have to get used to making decisions themselves or making plans themselves.

Michael Cowen:

There's one thing I'm going to try to do, because I think I hold people back when I save them by coming up with solutions when they come in with problems. That's not to say that if I saw someone doing something wrong or that would harm a case, I'd just let them do it. The woman, Liz Wiseman, who wrote the book Multipliers told a story that she was working for someone brilliant early in her career who was a big writer, and she'd do a lot of proofreading. She said, "One paragraph he has, it was a brilliant concept, but it was awkwardly written and I struggled with it and I just couldn't figure out how to rewrite it. So, I just put AWK., which is awkward, basically telling him to rewrite it." She handed it to him. She said within 10 minutes she hears stomping down the hallway, and he just walked right up to her desk, gave it back to her. He goes, "Never put AWK without an FIX."

Michael Cowen:

I think if I get back to, "Before I try to help you, how do you think we might able to solve this problem," and not jump in there as much for people and make them learn. Then if I disagree, I'll tell them. Then if

they need information from me... And at the end of the day, if they can't do it, I'm not going to let a case go bad because I'm trying to teach them a lesson. But if it's not something where the decision has to be made this second, maybe it's like, "Why don't you try to think of some solutions and come back and talk to me tomorrow, and we'll go over them," Instead of me trying to solve all the problems for people.

Michael Cowen:

I look at my to-do list and I think I'm still taking on too much of jumping in and doing things that someone else could probably figure out how to do, maybe with some guidance from me. Then, they know how to do them and they gain that confidence. So, I think that's a big lesson I learned in how I can not just make my own life better, but really help other people to reach their potential. I had a great talk with Joe Fried. He's made a lot more money than I have, but we're both at a position where, once you make a certain amount of money, making more doesn't have a material effect on your daily life. We were both talking about, you start getting the goal of, how can I develop someone else? How can I see someone else improve?

Michael Cowen:

You get a joy from that's greater than the joy of having another 50,000 bucks or another a 100,000 bucks when... Yes, that is a lot of money. But I said, once you have your house, your car, you get to go on trips wherever you want, you get to go eat whatever you want, you buy within reason anything you want, there's bigger things. To me, watching the development I've seen with you over the years and the development I'm seeing in some other people. So like Joe says, instead of thinking about how much does he want to make, he thinks how much can this other person in the office make? Of course, that's going to make him money too, but it's just a different way of looking at it. I think that I could use this experience to go back and look harder at how can I develop other people to make good decisions, to do other things that I'm doing myself, and then I can focus on even bigger and better things. So, that's my goal.

Malorie Peacock:

I like it. I like it. I'm excited to hear your ideas for it. We have our upcoming quarterly meetings.

Michael Cowen:

Okay. Well, Malorie, I just want to publicly thank you for letting me have the life that I have and for handling the law firm for me for two weeks. You're already putting me back to work, so I guess I better go back to work and start getting ready for these trials.

Malorie Peacock:

Yes, I am.

Michael Cowen:

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Outro:

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Outro:

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